

Ships

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Ships

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Summary

Japan ships Gerita, Italy seems totally clueless, and Germany's just trying to work out what the hell is going on.

Sketchbooks and Nosebleeds

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

"Germany! Hey, Germany! I'm a ukelele!" Italy bounded up to Germany with a happy smile on his face. Germany stared at him.

"...What?"

"Japan said I'm a ukelele! Japan wouldn't lie, right? Hey, Japan! Hi!" Italy waved at Japan, who had been following Italy at a more reasonable pace, clutching a sketchpad and a pencil in one hand.

"Oh. Herro, Germany-san. Italy-kun, that wasn't what I meant. I..." Japan leaned in to Italy and whispered something in his ear. Italy got a confused look on his face.

"I'm the U.K.? Silly Japan, I'm Italia!" This was said with a massive smile and a waving Italian flag (Italy keeps flags with him that aren't white? Shock horror!) "England's the U.K., right? Why did I just imagine France laughing? Oh well, it doesn't matter! Pastaaaa!"

Germany looked on with exasperation.

"I'm sorry if Italy has been causing you any trouble, Japan."

"No, it's fine. Italy-kun is very..." Japan seemed to be at a loss for words.

"I know. Italy, why exactly is Japan calling you England?"

"I dunno! Japan was doing some drawing so I snuck up on him to have a look. You know I love drawing, right? Anyway, so Japan noticed me pretty quick, 'cause I'm not so good at being all stealthy, right, but-"

"Italy." Germany looked like he was getting a headache.

"Oh, right! The drawing. Well, Japan was drawing me and Germany, so I asked him about it! He said he boats it-"

"I said I ship it, Italy-kun"

"-and that he was drawing a donut-genie!"

"Doujinshi, Italy-kun." Japan smiled slightly as he corrected Italy's horrible use of his home language.

"And I asked Japan why he was drawing a donut-genie, and he said I make a great ukulele! So I ran straight over here to tell Germany I'm a ukulele! " Germany looked at Japan.

"I have no idea what that means. Can you explain?" Japan suddenly blushed and shook his head.

"It's nothing. It doesn't mean anything. Please excuse me, I have to leave now-" He was cut off by Italy giving him a massive hug. "Italy-kun, please don't hug me like that..."

"Aww..." Italy pouted, then smiled, let go of Japan, and glomped Germany. "Germany likes hugs though, right? Yaaay!" Germany stiffened at first, then relaxed. Italy wasn't tall enough to properly hug him, so the smaller nation just had the side of his head pressed into Germany's shirt. Japan was staring at the two, eyes wide.

"Can you stay like that for a little?" He flipped over to a new page and started quickly drawing on his sketchpad. Germany's eyes narrowed.

"Japan, what exactly is a doujinshi, and what does it have to do with Italy and me?" Japan did not answer - he was scribbling furiously on the paper, a pink blush and a smile on his normally expressionless face.

"I dunno! But being a ukulele sounds fun!"

"Italy, you are a nation, not a musical instrument-" Italy stared up at Germany earnestly.

"But I'd be Germany's ukulele! He'd hold me all day and sing songs with me and I'd be so happy and I'd never let anyone play me but him! Or maybe Japan too! Hey, Japan, are you alright? Do you need a tissue? Germany's got a first-aid bag!" Japan shook his head and used his own tissue to wipe away the small nosebleed he had.

"I'm fine. Germany-san, Italy-kun, would you like to stay at my house tonight? I was planning to make noodles-"

"Yaaay! Pastaaa! Can we go, Germany, preeeease?" Italy looked up at Germany with the puppy-dog eyes that no living being on earth, nation or human, could resist.

"Yes Italy, we can stay at Japan's house. I need to ask him some questions about what exactly he's drawing." Germany tried to lean round Italy to get a better look at the sketchpad, but Japan stowed it away safely under his arm.

"Don't worry, Germany-san. It's inspiration for a manga I'm drawing. However, I only have one spare futon. Italy-kun, would you mind sleeping with Germany-san?"

"I don't mind at all! Neither does Germany! Right, Germany?"

"Italy, how many times have I told you not to make promises on behalf of other people?" Italy wasn't listening. He had detached himself from Germany and was skipping away, singing,

"Japan's making paaastaaa! Yaaayyy!"

Germany sighed and held his head in his hands.

"I'll go after him. We'll come to your house at about six o'clock, okay?"

"That's fine." Germany nodded and then went off after Italy.

Japan was left on his own. Checking Germany had really gone, he took out his sketchpad to put the finishing touches on his drawing.

"I wonder if I can draw them while they're sleeping too..."

Chapter End Notes

In case anyone's confused, 'uke' can mean an abbreviation for 'ukulele'.

Spaghetti and Low Ceilings

"Japan! Hey, Japan! I'm heeere!"

Japan was in the middle of cleaning his house for the two guests. It was five-thirty and he hadn't expected them for a while. Quickly, he put away the cleaning things and answered his door.

"I am very sorry to have made you wait for me, Italy-kun." He bowed low in apology, before squawking in protest as Italy tackle-hugged him as soon as he straightened up. "Italy-kun, please..."

"That's fine! I was so excited about the pasta – yay, pastaaa! – and I made Germany take me here extra especially early so I could eat it as soon as possible!"

Italy released Japan and ran into the house. The thumps of his footsteps made Japan wince slightly as he saw the muddy footprints on his floor. Then, he turned to greet the other nation at the door.

"Germany-san. It is a pleasure." He bowed. Germany gave an awkward kind of stiff nod before stepping across the threshold – and whacking his head on the door frame.

"Germany-san! I am very sorry, I should have warned you! I have failed my duties as a host-"

"Japan, it's fine. I get a worse headache from dealing with Italy every day. Do you know where he ran off to?" As if on cue, there was a faint noise from inside the house.

"Germany, heeelp me! It's all dark and scary in here and I can't find the pastaaa!"

"I think Italy-kun may have gotten lost..." Japan was obviously totally overwhelmed by now, and didn't know what to do. Germany took the initiative and yelled out:

"Italy! Follow my voice back to me, okay!"

There was a faint "Okay!" from somewhere in the house and then more running footsteps, this time getting closer. Italy sped around the corner, knocking Japan to the floor, and then took a running jump at Germany.

"Germany! You saved me! It was dark and there was no pasta anywhere and then I heard a bonk and I thought it might be France sneaking up on me or even worse England trying to cook pasta but then Germany yelled out and everything got better! Yaaay!" Germany tried to push Italy away from him a little to get some breathing room, but Italy held on and kept babbling nonsense. Germany cut him off.

"Italy!" Italy stopped immediately and looked up at Germany. "You need to apologise to Japan for knocking him over." Italy suddenly caught sight of Japan, who was rubbing his head where it had hit the wall.

"I'm so soooooorry! I didn't mean to, honest! Are you okay? Did I hit you in the face?" Japan was staring at the two European nations hugging. He was pinching his nose to stop it from bleeding. "Germany carries a first aid kit everywhere for when I get hurt! I'm sure he'd give you something from it! Right, Germany?" Japan shook his head.

"Italy-kun, I am fine. However, I have not started to cook the noodles so-"

"I'll make them! Umm, Japan, where exactly is the kitchen? I couldn't find it anywhere!" Japan seemed to take this as an opportunity to get some control back over his house.

"I will show you, Italy-kun. Germany-san, follow me too." Japan lead the way into the house, switching on lights as he went (he kept them off normally, to conserve energy). Italy skipped alongside him and Germany followed the two, stooping low to avoid any more close encounters with ceilings.

"This is where I make my noodles, Italy-kun." The kitchen was gleaming and spotless (or would have been, were it not for Italy's shoes). The pasta-loving nation bounced around the room like he had won the lottery.

"Yaaaay! Pasta pasta pasta! I'll start cooking it right away!" He started to raid the cupboards and eventually pulled out a metal saucepan. "I'll have it ready in ten minutes!" Japan bowed in thanks.

"The noodles are in the top shelf, Italy-kun. Arso, please stir-fry them when you are done, with plenty of soy sauce." At this Italy stopped and thought a bit, before smiling brightly.

"Okay! I'll do that!" And then he was off again, jumping about like America on a sugar high. Germany sighed.

"Japan, shall we go somewhere else? I want to discuss something with you. It's about that manga you were drawing earlier."

As soon as they had left the kitchen, Germany fixed Japan with a glare. Japan shivered – Germany could be scary when he got angry.

"Now. I want an honest answer from you, Japan. Why were you drawing Italy and me?"

"Anou... anou... I was... anou..." Germany seemed to notice the effect he was having on Japan and lessened the glare a little bit. Really, it wasn't good practice to intimidate your allies like that. He and Japan sat down at a western-style dining table which had already been set.

"Okay, fine. I know you like your privacy. But please, what on earth did you mean when you called Italy a ukulele? He's been going on about it all afternoon!"

Japan's face coloured, but he stood on tiptoe to whisper into Germany's ear. "Yes, but what does that even mean?"

"It means that Italy-kun is very happy and bouncy!"

"Really? Is that it? I thought it meant something... more than that." Japan shook his head quickly.

"It means nothing else!" Germany looked like he didn't quite believe Japan, but he decided to let the subject drop... for now.

"Paaaastaaaa!" After all, he had more pressing things to worry about.

Italy bounded into the room, a beaming grin on his face, clutching a massive pan of noodles. He set it down on the table - Japan tried to hold back a wince at the lack of any kind of heat-mat - and brandished a serving spoon at the two counties.

"Okay! Pasta is done! Who wants it first?" Italy looked at the noodles. "Can I have it first?" Taking the other countries's silence as a yes, he proceeded to scoop it onto his plate. One scoop... two scoops... three scoops...

When Italy had taken four scoops of noodles (leaving less than half remaining in the pan), he smiled and began to serve the other two. Japan stared at the noodles on his plate with a critical eye.

"Italy-kun, did you use the noodles on the top shelf? These seem very... substantial." Italy stopped and looked at Japan.

"There was pasta on the top shelf? Oh, I kinda forgot! See, I'm kinda short so I can't reach the top shelf in most places so I bring my own pasta wherever I go so I'm never without any although sometimes I forget that too and have to ask Germany for help reaching the top shelf and..." Japan sweatdropped.

"My house is designed for small people, Italy-kun. You could easily have reached the top shelf." He pointed out. Italy blushed, embarrassed.

"Um, I wasn't listening when you told me? Oops?" Germany, who up until this point had been slightly confused at what was going on, suddenly caught up.

"Wait, Italy, did you just stir-fry spaghetti?" Italy nodded.

"Yup!" Germany took another look at the 'noodles' on his plate. Now that he looked closer, they were definitely more Italian than Japanese - apart from the soy sauce, that is. "Don't worry, Germany! It's pasta so it will taste really good no matter how it's been cooked. Yay for pastaaaa!" Italy dug into his massive portion with a fork. "C'mon, Japan, Germany, let's eat!"

Japan was staring in barely concealed horror at this mockery of his cultural dish. Not wanting to be a bad host, he picked up his pair of chopsticks and took a small bite.

"It's not actually that bad..."

"Of course! It's pastaaa!"

Germany twirled some of the pasta-noodles hybrid around his fork and took a bite too. Surprisingly, it was good. Excellent, even. The way the Japanese soy and mediterranean herb flavours combined was nothing short of spectacular.

"Italy, you manage to make a culinary masterpiece even when you mess things up. I don't..."

"Mmh?" Italy looked at him. The pasta-loving nation had been sucking the noodles up like a hoover, so his cheeks were stained with soy sauce and puffed out due to a full mouth. A few strings of spaghetti were hanging down, touching his plate.

"Italy, don't do that! You'll choke!" Biting off the ends of the spaghetti strings so they fell back onto the plate and swallowing the rest of the pasta, Italy smiled and shook his head.

"I never choke when doing this! ...Japan? ...Hey, Japan? Are you sure that you're okay? Do you need another tissue?"

Ghosts and Night Vision Goggles

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

After the meal was done, Japan excused himself briefly so he could finish setting up the futons. He came back a few minutes later to see Italy sitting on Germany's lap while the latter tried hard to get all the soy sauce off his face. Japan quietly tiptoed out of the doorway, hopefully unnoticed by either of the two, and went to get a camera.

"Germany? Umm, where'd Japan go?" A few minutes later, and Italy's face was apparently clean enough for Germany's satisfaction. He pushed the smaller nation off of him and back onto his chair. Then, he looked around.

"I don't know, Italy." Japan had said something about sorting out their sleeping arrangements, but Germany hadn't registered it as important. His mind had been preoccupied with the ghastly mess that Italy's face had become. Honestly, was it even possible to get that much sauce on your forehead?

"Do you think Japan's okay? It's really scary being alone in this house!"

"I'm sure he's fine. He lives here."

"But... but what if..." Italy's face showed that he obviously didn't agree with Germany.

"What if he... America said Japan's house was really scaaary! Like, there are ghosts and things and when I was here earlier I think I saw something weird and I got out my surrender flag and-"

Germany tuned Italy out fought the urge to roll his eyes. Typical Italy, getting terrified over the strangest of things.

"Look, Italy, if you really care about Japan that much, I'll look for him. But you have to promise to stay right here. I mean it. Italy, look at me!" He now had the small nation's full attention. "No moving from this table until I return, okay?" Italy stared straight at Germany, with tears still shining in his eyes from his momentary fit of hysteria.

"Okay..." God, how did Italy manage to be so... so... exasperating, but cute? Germany was sure Japan had told him a word for it, but he couldn't remember what it was. He shook his head to clear his mind and walked out the door. A soft "Good luck, Germany..." followed him as he left the room.

Italy stared blankly at the now-closing door. Then, he stared at the table, which still had the pan of spaghetti sitting on it. There was a little bit left. Italy looked back at the door and bit his lip in thought. He glanced once again at the pasta.

With a smile, he began helping himself to the last of the spaghetti. Within a few seconds flat, he had polished off what was left in the pan and now had his face covered in soy sauce.

Again.

Germany met Japan walking down the hallway back towards the dining room.

"Japan, why do you have a camera with you?"

Japan stared at him like a deer caught in the headlights.

"Anou... I... was making sure it worked?" Germany raised his eyebrow in a 'really?' expression. Japan squeezed his eyes shut and shook his head rapidly. "Germany-san, I cannot say!"

"...fine. Italy was worried about you." With that said, Germany turned and went back down the corridor. He opened the door to the dining room.

"Italy..." The smaller nation looked up at him, soy sauce all over his face. He gave a massive happy grin.

"Germany! Yay! And Japan's okay! But there's no more pasta 'cause I ate it all..." Germany merely resisted the urge to facepalm and started cleaning Italy's face with a napkin again. Really, Italy was like a little child.

Neither of them noticed Japan, who was taking multiple pictures. Germany was concentrating on Italy and Italy was just leaning back into Germany, smiling as he thought about pasta.

Some time later, the Axis Powers were dressed in their nightgear, sitting on a couple of futons. There were only two, so two of them would have to share. Fortunately for Japan, Germany took pity on him (knowing how much he needed personal space) and offered to sleep with Italy. The pasta-loving nation nodded in agreement.

"Yay! I can sleep in Germany's bed again!"

'Again?' thought Japan with a slight blush on his face, masked by the darkness of the room.

"Germany-san, Italy-kun, is this an acceptable time for you to go to bed?"

"Yes, thank you, Japan. You have been very accommodating." Each nation slept and woke according to the country's time zone - which was why Russia could be a creepy insomniac and Antarctica just slept through half the year - so Japan had used blinds to block out the sunlight from outside to allow the European nations to sleep in peace.

"It is no trouble, Germany-san." Italy pouted.

"Aww... but I wanted to stay up really late and tell ghost stories!"

"Italy, how many times do I have to tell you this? We are not telling ghost stories, because then you get terrified and end up suffocating me while I try to get some rest!"

"Germany-san? I also enjoy ghost stories..." There was a slightly awkward silence.

"...very well then." There was the rustling of sheets as Germany got into a sleeping position. "But don't expect me to listen to them."

Italy looked at Germany, biting his lip. Then, with fearful anticipation, he locked eyes with Japan.

"Tell me a ghost story!" He whispered.

"This story is about America-san. He says it's true and really happened to him. America-san is... haunted."

The story ended, and by that time Italy was nearly shaking from fear.

"Did that really happen to America?"

"Hai. He swears that he still sees the ghost, even to this day. Do you want to hear another one?"

"No, it's too scary!" Italy half snuggled, half dived under the covers and pulled them over his head. "I'm going to sleep now!"

It was hard for Italy to go to sleep. The story he had been told whizzed about his mind. What made it scarier is that Japan had said others had seen the ghost, so it wasn't just an imaginary friend like the ones England had. As a matter of fact, Italy thought he might have seen it...

Except he couldn't remember. Any time you looked away from the ghost, you forgot it. Japan had said that was how it worked. America was the only one able to see the ghost and remember.

Normally he would just make Germany his very own stuffed toy until all the nightmares had been chased away, but... stuffed toys... Japan said the ghost carried one, like China's panda but bleached of all colour, with beady black eyes and a high, cold voice. Italy resolved to not think or do anything stuffed-toy related. Eventually, he drifted off into a relatively calm sleep.

Japan watched the two other nations for half an hour or more, not sleepy in the slightest as it was still daytime in Japan. He had hoped the ghost story might make Italy cling to Germany, but it seemed to have done the opposite. Germany was sleeping straight as a board on the far side of the futon (with his feet sticking out of the end), and Italy was holding onto the covers for dear life, only a few inches from Japan himself.

Slowly, ever so slowly, so as not to wake either of his two allies, Japan eased himself off the futon and padded silently from the room. He returned a minute or so later, with his sketchpad and pencil in hand and a pair of ultra hi-tech night vision deluxe super-goggles strapped to his head (Japan had a thing for technology). He sat back on the futon, cross-legged, and began to draw.

The scratching of the pencil was the only sound in the silence.

Scratch.

Scratch.

Scratch.

Flip. Japan finished the drawing and turned to a new page.

Scratch.

Scratch. Japan started to blush and had to remove the goggles to wipe his nose with a tissue. Once he had controlled himself, he continued.

Scratch.

Scratch.

"Hey, Japan? What are you drawing?"

Shock made Japan drop the pencil and scramble back as he looked at Italy, whose eyes were open and staring right back at him.

"Anou... anou..." His voice trembled as he grappled about for the pencil.

"Hey, you're wearing really funny glasses! Can I try them on?"

"Sure." Japan was extremely grateful at that moment for Italy's short attention span. He surrendered the goggles to Italy and surreptitiously moved the sketchpad away, tucking it under his pillow.

"Um, Japan? your face is glowing green... ooh, did you know you have a book under your pillow? Maybe the tooth fairy put it there!"

'The tooth... wait, what?' Japan realised too late and dived for the sketchpad but Italy had already swiped it and was looking at the drawings.

Japan tried to clam his racing heart.

'It's fine... the pad was closed when Italy-kun took it... he'll look at the pages in order... he'll lose interest before he sees any of... that.'

Italy, meanwhile, was flipping through each page with wide eyes.

"Wow, Japan, you're really good at drawing! The eyes look so cool..." Then he stopped. Froze. Even in the dark, Japan could see the blush that spread over his face.

'Oh no...'

Japan was surprised when, instead of screaming in horror or waking up Germany to show him the pictures, Italy kept flicking through, albeit at a slightly slower pace (that was probably the shock.) When Italy reached the last page, he stopped altogether, scrutinising the picture Japan had just been drawing. It wasn't anywhere near finished, but it was more than clear by the pencil outline both what it was and who the two people were. Japan shifted uncomfortably.

"You're a very good artist, Japan." Italy's voice was soft, and didn't sound offended.

"I..." Japan really didn't know what to say. What did you do when one of your two best friends caught you drawing... that? "I'm sorry, Italy-kun..."

"Hmm?" Italy seemed almost confused. "Sorry? But you're a really great artist, I'm not just saying that! Honest!" He handed the sketchbook back over to Japan. "I really like the style, too."

"You're not... angry that I was drawing you and Germany-san?" Italy looked quizzically at Japan, before shaking his head.

"Nope. Why would I be? Art is art is art!"

"Even if it's..."

"Have you ever seen the sculptures they have in my country? Nobody's bothered about those, so why should I be bothered about this? It's just two people instead of one!"

Japan felt like crying at that moment. He wasn't quite sure why, but he did. He'd never really believed that any of the western nations would accept his hobbies like that, after America had been scared off when he introduced him to them. To have the person he considered so close to him just shrug it off like it was nothing meant an awful lot.

"Umm, I'm not sure if I'm ever going to be able to look at a bowl of pasta again without, umm... thinking of... that, though." Japan's face reddened even more as he remembered exactly what he had drawn.

"I'm sorry..."

"Don't be! Art is art is art!" A rustling noise sounded from the other side of Italy's futon before a sleepy

"Italy? Why are you still up?" issued from it. Germany was waking up.

Japan felt a chill go down his spine and the hands that held the sketchbook began to sweat. It was one thing to have your happy-go-lucky forgive-everyone friend find out, and a whole other thing for Germany to see. Germany was so protective of Italy he'd probably drop an atom bomb on Japan if he ever found out.

...stop that thought right there. Japan had promised America never to think of that again.

Japan was brought out of his horrified stupor by Italy throwing the night-vision goggles in his face. Stunned, he caught them, and then watched Italy dive-tackle Germany.

"Germany! I was so scared because Japan's story was really scary and I thought there might be a ghost and I had a nightmare but I didn't want to wake you up but I" Germany was taken totally by surprise, and Japan used the moment to surreptitiously store the sketchpad back under his pillow.

"-and then I dreamed that England was cooking pasta and I..." Italy sniffled and began to tear up. "But now Germany's awake and he's much bigger and badder and scarier than any of the nightmares so if I hug him maybe they'll all go away!"

"Italy? If you were having a nightmare, you could have woken me. I don't mind it if it's for a good reason, you know." Italy wiped his face and nodded.

"I know. But it was terrifying! England was cooking pasta!" Italy seemed to be stressing this as if it was the end of all things good. Japan had just about time to comprehend that Italy was lying to Germany to protect him, but then his stupid trivia obsession had to surface and ruin everything.

"Italy-kun, did you know that spaghetti bolognese is the second most popular food in England?" Italy nearly screamed in terror and hugged Germany more tightly. Germany glared at Japan.

"You're not helping! How do you even know that, anyway?" The patented Germany-Glare was nowhere near as effective in the dark, so Japan felt safe enough to answer.

"Anou... game shows."

Germany gave an exasperated sigh, and decided to let it go for now.

"Come on Italy, let's get you back to sleep. England is on the other side of the world from us now. He's not going to cook anything."

"Okay, Germany..." Italy gave a massive yawn. "I'm sleepy... should'a brought my ukulele so you could sing me to sleep..." With that, his death-grip relaxed and Germany was left with a nation snoozing on his chest. Awkwardly, he reached a hand around Italy's body and patted his shoulder. Italy responded by slipping off Germany and snuggling up to his side. Together, the two nations fell asleep.

Japan was left watching his allies in the darkness of the room. Slowly, he clicked on the night-vision goggles, and his eyes nearly bugged out at what he saw. Quickly, he got out the sketchpad to check.

Yes, Italy had somehow managed to maneuver the two so they were sleeping in almost the exact same position Japan had been drawing them in. Well, taking a few liberties with the clothes... and covers... but still, this was too much of a coincidence!

Whatever it was, Japan didn't want to waste an opportunity. He picked up his pencil again and scratched at the paper. The small sound alerted Italy, who moved his head just a fraction so he could lock eyes with Japan and winked.

Winked.

Then the moment was gone, and Japan was left staring in quiet contemplation at his two friends, curled together on his futon while the sun still shone outside.

'Italy-kun is not so useless after all... maybe calling that manga "Hetalia" was a bit too much...'

Then he gave a shrug, and kept on drawing.

Chapter End Notes

If you were wondering about the doujinshi Japan was drawing... England's black magic and horrendous cooking skills, tentacle porn with pasta... I'll let you work out the details for yourself. I can see why Italy would be embarrassed.

Guns, Pancakes and Whisker Curls

Germany woke up as the sun was touching the horizon - he could tell that from the orange light that had fallen into his eyes. Still caught in the haze between waking and sleeping, he felt oddly cold, and this bed didn't feel like his usual one - it was much too short. He reached out a hand, expecting to find Italy there next to him. When he realised Italy wasn't there (that was probably why he was feeling cold), he felt under his pillow for his gun. That wasn't there either.

'...Hmm?' He opened his eyes.

He was lying, alone, on the futon in Japan's room. The orange light had come from a tiny crack in the blinds, and now that he thought about it it was probably sunset, not sunrise. Next to him, curled up tight on another futon with a calm and happy expression that only comes from having a good dream, lay the softly sleeping form of Japan. Italy was nowhere to be seen.

With what pretty much amounted to a groan of exasperation, Germany got out of bed and prepared to rescue Italy from whatever dire situation he had managed to get himself into this time. He smelt cooking Italian food, so one guess only where Italy was and what he was doing. Honestly, did Italy really have to cook pasta for breakfast? Germany was pretty sure that they didn't even do that in Italy the country.

'Wait... if Italy used up his spaghetti last night to make us dinner, what is he using now?'

That was enough to get Germany up and headed straight to the kitchen, prepared to stop Italy before he somehow managed to make noodles bolognese.

The kitchen was only in the next room, so it didn't take Germany long to find Italy and then stare in absolute shock. Italy was not cooking pasta...

"Who are you and what have you done to Italy Veneciano!" Germany shouted as he shoved Italy up against the wall in the kitchen, banging Italy's head on one of the cupboards. In a practised movement Germany went for his gun, but remembered he did not have it with him. He settled for pinning the Italy-impostor's arms to the wall with one hand and fixing him with the deadliest glare he could manage.

Italy stared up at Germany, his eyes round and huge and making the most adorable face ever.

"Germany... it's me!" Germany gave a low growl and fixed him with the *glare* and Italy gulped, shutting up.

Japan was awoken quite rudely from his sleep by a slamming sound and Germany's yell. A quick check of both the setting sun outside and the clock hanging on the wall told him he had only been asleep for an hour at most. He wanted so much to hide under the covers and stuff a pillow around his head so he could get back to that brilliant dream he'd been having... but

then he would fail his duties as a host. With a sigh, he rubbed his eyes to get rid of the sleepiness and went to see what his allies had done now.

Japan arrived in the kitchen to see Germany pinning Italy up against the wall. After quickly grabbing some kitchen roll to stop the nosebleed and rescuing his mind from the gutter, he cautiously called out to Germany.

"Germany-san? What is going on?" Germany's head whipped around when he heard Japan's voice, but he seemed to relax when he saw the nation. Japan had been suffering from frequent nosebleeds lately, and the bloody kitchen roll proved that this was the same Japan as always.

"Someone's impersonating Italy!" At this, Italy shook his head wildly.

"I'm real, like really real, really me! Japan, you believe me right?"

"Don't listen to him, Japan. The real Italy would never not cook pasta, given the choice. He has to be a fake!" Germany's voice sounded almost desperate.

"B-but I didn't feel like making pasta today..." Italy stared at Japan with eyes that tried to convey a hidden message. Japan felt his heart sink into his stomach as he realised he had probably been the cause of this. It was up to him to stop this misunderstanding before it got way out of hand.

"Germany-san! Italy-kun is not an impostor! I swear it to you!" His words made Germany hesitate - Japan never spoke up against anything anymore, preferring to sense the atmosphere and refrain from speaking. Japan must be really sure of this.

Germany turned back to Italy. There was one surefire way to make sure that he really was Italy... he reached out with one hand and pulled the curl that always stuck out from Italy's hair. On a normal person this wouldn't do a thing, beyond maybe making them wince a bit.

Italy squealed with a volume that could probably raise the roof and managed to twist his arms out of Germany's now one-handed grip, bringing them protectively over his head. Germany's eyes widened in horrified realisation and he stepped back from Italy, muttering a quick "I'm incredibly sorry I have to go now bye!" before running out of the kitchen, pushing past Japan and slamming the door behind him. Japan was left staring at Italy for a long awkward moment.

"Are you alright, Italy-kun?..." The unspoken 'what was that?' hung in the air between them.

Italy closed his eyes, taking a deep breath in, out, in, and then he cracked up in a fit of giggles. Despite the situation, Japan found himself struggling not to laugh. Eventually, Italy got a hold of himself, wiped tears (whether they were from the shock of before or just laughing too hard, Japan couldn't tell) from his eyes and answered Japan's question.

"I'm fiiiine! Germany was so worried about me, that makes me happy! Are you okay? Your nose is bleeding again... Oh and, I have to go tell Germany that everything's all good! 'Scuse me, Japan!" He tried to go out of the room, but was stopped by Japan throwing an arm out to stop the door from opening.

"Italy-kun, I think Germany-san needs a little time to himself at the moment." Japan was well aware of the cultural differences between Italy and Germany, the former being much more openly friendly while the latter preferred some time alone to get over disputes. Not that Italy seemed to think it had been anything serious, but Germany was probably beating himself up over it right now.

"O-oh. Okay, I guess. Hmm, I should get back to cooking~" Italy almost sang the last word as he returned to preparing... whatever he was preparing. He was obviously using Mediterranean herbs, from the Italian smell that wafted though the kitchen, but as for what they were going into... pancake batter? Something like that, maybe.

"I got some inspiration from the ghost story you told me last night; the one about America and the spirit everyone forgets. Didn't you say America thought he had a curl? Maybe it's like mine!"

"Anou... Italy-kun? What exactly does your curl do?" It had definitely done something when Germany pulled it earlier, and Japan's curiosity had got the better of him. Italy stilled with one egg held critically to his eye in preparation for cracking as he thought for a second on how best to explain.

"Well, it's a bit like a cat's whisker, in a way. You know how Italians don't have much sense of personal space? The curl tells me when I'm getting too close to someone so I should back off a bit and give them some breathing room." He tapped the egg against the glass bowl to break the shell and let the yolk fall into the mix.

"Does it hurt you when someone touches it?" Italy's face gained a light blush as he set down the eggshell and picked up the whisk.

"Umm... not really... I mean, if someone pulls it really, really hard then yes... If you just touch it it doesn't hurt at all, it actually feels... um..."

"Can I touch it, Italy-kun?" Japan wasn't sure what made him ask, and he regretted it when Italy gave a little "Eeep!" and covered his hair again.

"Um, I'd prefer it if you didn't... It's there to tell me if I'm too close to someone, so if it's touched I really feel like someone's invading my personal space..." It was Japan's turn to blush and feel incredibly awkward.

"Sumimasen, I should not have asked." He gave a low, stiff bow, before opening the door a little, edging backwards into the bedroom, and shutting the door again. If it was a choice between an emotionally disturbed ally and an awkward situation, he'd take the former any day. However, the room was empty; he guessed Germany had gone into the dining room, leaving Japan alone with his thoughts.

Japan thought to himself that he had never really understood European nations and their tendencies to bicker, which only led to disputes and fights (and between two nations, a fight could end up in a declaration of war, which made them somewhat more serious than human ones). He'd never understood Italy much either, as the little nation was so friendly. The incident from earlier had been justification enough for a diplomatic reprisal, especially since

the Allied Powers were still touchy about World War Two and would jump on any chance to get back at Germany.

But no, Italy had just waved it off with a laugh and even said it made him happy that Germany cared about him enough to do something like that. If Germany had done that to Japan, alliances or no alliances, he would very quickly have been on the receiving end of a dagger at the throat. Japan kept one on him at all times for his safety, even hiding it under his pillow when he went to sleep.

...and he had forgotten to pick it up when he had been woken up, hadn't he?

Shaking his head in silent disbelief at how he could have been so careless, Japan crossed over to the futon and lifted up the pillow.

Nothing was there.

'That's strange... I'm sure I had it here... could Germany-san have taken it when he came through earlier?' And then, cold horror shot down Japan's spine as he remembered what else he had stored under his pillow. 'The sketchbook... Kuso.'

A few minutes earlier...

Germany half stumbled, half sprinted out of the kitchen and slammed the door behind him. He slid down the wall, holding his head in his hands. How could he have done that to Italy? He would never be forgiven. The previously inconceivable Japanese notion of ritual suicide seemed pretty attractive now, as Germany thought he might just die of embarrassment if he ever had to face Italy again.

That's right, he still didn't have his gun. He normally slept with it under his pillow, and had forgotten it this morning (night? The sun had pretty much set...), so he should probably retrieve it now.

He lifted up the pillow on the futon he and Italy had slept on, but was surprised to find nothing there.

'That's odd... was it under the wrong futon?'

Slowly, Germany lifted up the pillow on the other futon to reveal...

Japan sat, trance like, staring at the empty spot on the futon where he was sure his sketchbook had been, feeling his world crashing around him. It wasn't just the sketchbook itself - the drawings, while being very valuable to him due to the amount of time he had spent on them, were not irreplaceable - it was Germany's friendship that would be totally and utterly lost if he ever saw what was in there.

Behind him, he heard the sound of Germany coming back into the room, and took a deep breath, his heart beginning to race. It was time to face the music... or whatever that

expression was, anyway. Japan doubted Germany's shouts would be in any way musical.

"Japan, do you know where my gun is?" Japan didn't turn around to look, but he froze.

'Germany... is pointing a gun at me?' Germany had taken his dagger, so he had no way to defend himself.

"I am sorry, Germany-san. I... please forgive me."

"Oh, I just thought you might have taken it, that's all. I can't seem to find it anywhere." Wait... what? Japan looked around.

Germany was standing in the doorway to the dining room (stooping, more like, to avoid banging his head), not holding a gun at all, not looking angry, and not glaring at Japan.

"Anou... where have you looked?" Hope began to flare in Japan's chest.

"Well, I tried looking under your pillow," The hope was crushed. "but it wasn't there. It's not on any of the shelves or under the futons... I was just checking to see if I had left it in the dining room, but I don't think it's in there."

"Did you see my sketchbook?"

"No... why? Is it lost?" Japan would have collapsed to the floor in relief if he hadn't already been sitting down.

"Iie! No! I just... anou..." Then Japan suddenly realised something big that he'd missed.

"YOU BROUGHT A GUN INTO MY HOUSE WITHOUT TELLING ME?" Japan himself, the national personification of his country, wasn't even allowed to carry a gun - the laws were that strict. To think that a foreigner had brought one in...

Italy suddenly burst into the room, white flag ready in hand.

"Hey, I heard shouting! Do I need to surrender to anyone?" He took in the sight of Japan sitting cross-legged on the futon and Germany standing in the doorway across from him, and slowly stowed away the flag. "Nope, guess not! Germany and Japan will protect me from all the bad guys! Yaay!"

"Italy... I'm sorry." Germany seemed to stumble over the wording, and Italy tilted his head in confusion.

"What for?"

"I hurt you... I couldn't even recognise that you were my ally."

"I don't mind! It was just a misunderstanding, that's all! I know Germany will always be there to protect me from all the bad guys!"

"Italy, you can't know that."

"Yes I can!" Italy spoke with total conviction.

"How?"

Italy did not verbally answer. Instead, he closed his eyes, raised his arms and let himself fall backwards, plummeting towards the ground. Japan watched in shock, unable to do a thing.

Germany acted on what might as well have been instinct, running forward and grabbing Italy's arms before he hit the floor. Italy's head came to rest only a couple of centimetres away from what would have been both incredibly painful and probably long-term damage. He smiled up at Germany.

"See? You'll always protect me, right, Germany?"

Japan was in total awe. Italy - the country terrified of pain - hadn't made a sound, not even when it had seemed utterly certain that he would smash into the floor. Was it even possible for a person to trust another person that much? Suddenly, he felt very, very lonely.

Germany pulled Italy up by the arms and for once actually hugged him, holding him close for a few seconds before backing off and staring right into his eyes.

"Italy Veneciano, don't you dare ever do that again. Do you understand?" Italy nodded.

"Okay! Oooh, I heard you two talking about guns. I'll go get your stuff back for you! See, I saw Germany's gun and Japan's dagger under the pillows and I kinda took them away so they wouldn't hurt anyone so now they're on the top shelf and I'll give them back now and bye!" He disentangled himself from a slightly shell-shocked Germany and skipped away, whistling.

"...You keep a dagger under your pillow, Japan?" Japan looked a little sheepishly at Germany.

"Sumimasen... I guess we don't trust each other as much as Italy-kun does."

Italy skipped back, carrying a gun, a knife, Japan's sketchbook and a box of art supplies (which he always carried around with him and slept with under his pillow) and returned the items to their respective owners.

"Breakfast's nearly done, so I'll be back soon!" Darting into the kitchen again, he emerged with a large pancake stack made with Italian herbs and tomato sauce. "Do you like it? I call it... the leaning tower of Pizza!"

It was when Italy and Germany had left for their flight back home that Japan went through his sketchbook and saw, on the very back page, a full-colour drawing in Japanese manga style of the three Axis Powers, dressed in their military uniforms, smiling together while Italy made a peace sign. Below it was a short note.

'I woke up early and wanted to draw something but I didn't have any paper! Hope you don't mind.

~Italy'

Japan smiled to himself as he set the sketchbook down and prepared to finally, *finally*, get a good night's rest. First though, he opened a tin of canned tuna for Japan-cat to eat and, as the black and white feline sat purring on his lap, deliberated whether or not to stroke his whiskers. Eventually, he decided against it for now, but he resolved to ask Greece what cats did if their whiskers were touched at the next world meeting. Or whenever he came round Japan's house, whichever was soonest.

...Not that soon, though. Japan had had enough European nations around his house to last him a while. Smiling, he put away both the empty tuna can (to recycling) and the sketchbook (back under his pillow) before snuggling back under the covers of his futon and drifting off to sleep.

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